


Betrayal in the Life of Edward de Vere & the Works of Shakespeare

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“The reasoned criticism of a prevailing belief is a service to the proponents of that belief; if they are incapable of defending it, they are well advised to abandon it. . . . Any substantive objection is permissible and encouraged; the only exception being that *ad hominem* attacks on the personality or motives of the author are excluded.”

— Carl Sagan

 We have betrayed Shakespeare. We have failed to recognize his true identity. Any discussion of the theme of betrayal in his works must begin here. We psychoanalysts have also betrayed Freud, in “analyzing” rather than evaluating objectively Freud’s passionately held belief during his final years that “William Shakespeare” was the pseudonym of the Elizabethan courtier poet and playwright Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford (1550-1604).¹ Freud realized that one unconscious motive for our betrayal of Shakespeare² is our implacable wish to idealize him. That is, we prefer to accept the traditional author not just in spite of how little we know about him, but precisely *because* we know so little about him. Thus, we can more easily imagine that this shadowy inkblot of a figure was as glorious a person as are his literary creations. The real Shakespeare was a highly flawed human being who knew betrayal first-hand, since his childhood, from both sides, both as betrayer and betrayed.

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Betrayal recurs as a salient theme throughout the works of Shakespeare. Shakespeare was never content with simplistic explanations of any action or emotion, including betrayal. Characteristically, his writings are so alive and true to life because he recognized and depicted the full complexity of the real world, avoiding the oversimplified representations that so often scotomatize and limit our understanding of people. So it is with his portrayals of betrayal. He thus helps us reflect on the many levels of meaning of feeling betrayed: of being overly trusting, or of realizing one has betrayed another.

Perhaps the best known three words in all of Shakespeare are “*Et tu Brute?*” (“Even you, Brutus?”), spoken by Julius Caesar as he realizes Brutus has betrayed him and has joined the treasonous conspirators.³ Caesar’s next words are “Then fall, Caesar.” Betrayal by one he so deeply trusted leads the mighty Caesar to crumble and submit to his assassination. Characteristically, Shakespeare gives us such a balanced picture of Caesar and his enemies that we can view both sides with some sympathy. Like a good psychoanalyst, Shakespeare refrains from being judgmental. The conspirators have good reason to fear that Caesar intends to subvert their beloved Roman republic, and revert to a dictatorship.

One way Shakespeare saves Caesar from our complete contempt is through unconscious communication with the audience⁴ (Waugaman, 2007). Contrary to past assumptions, it now seems likely that Shakespeare easily read both Latin and ancient Greek. So he knew that Suetonius wrote that Caesar’s last words were “*kai su, teknon?*” or “even you, my son?” But, in addition, Shakespeare was echoing the form of Jesus’ expression of betrayal by his heavenly Father in his dying words in his native Aramaic, “Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani?” (“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”). This illustrates Shakespeare’s unrivalled use of unconscious communication as one of the many ways he moves us. That is, Caesar “code-switches” to a foreign tongue to ask a question at the moment of his betrayal and submission to death, just as Jesus does in two of the Gospels. The audience is subliminally encouraged by this parallel to view Caesar as a Christ-like martyr, and therefore a more sympathetic figure.

Shirley Nelson Garner⁵ writes that betrayal is such a recurrent theme in Shakespeare that we can make some plausible speculations about conflicts with trust and deception in the life of the author. In particular, Garner focuses on the five plays where men feel profoundly betrayed by women (falsely, except in *Troilus and Cressida*). Garner shows that the jealous men in these plays have such deep mistrust of women that they engage in compensatory idealization, which makes them all the more vulnerable to disillusionment. Garner believes that the sequence of the plays suggests that Shakespeare gradually came to understand that the primary problem was not that women actually betray men, but that some men suffer from a “diseased imagination” that leads to their false suspicions of women. She also infers that Shakespeare keeps repeating a core fantasy that women will always forgive the men who wrong them, including wronging them through their pathological jealousy. So Shakespeare makes it clear that the subjective feeling of betrayal may result from pathological jealousy, rather than from actual duplicity. Simultaneously, there may be “pathological trust” in the wrong person.

Garner addresses themes of betrayal in the five plays:

- In *Othello*, the title character develops pathological jealousy of his new wife Desdemona, as a result of his falsely placed trust in Iago. Iago fiendishly plays on Othello's insecurities to manipulate him into misinterpreting Desdemona's innocent behavior as certain proof that she has been unfaithful. In a pattern found in other plays by Shakespeare, Othello's erroneous belief that he has been betrayed by Desdemona leads *him* to betray *her*—in Othello's case, by murdering her.
- Similarly, in *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes is pathologically jealous of his wife Hermione. When she is innocently hospitable toward Leontes' visiting friend Polixenes, Leontes convinces himself (without the help of any Iago-like character) that Hermione is in love with Polixenes. Leontes then turns on Hermione so viciously that she dies of grief because of her husband's betrayal. But many years later, a statue of Hermione magically comes to life, and she is reunited with Leontes.
- In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Claudio and other characters falsely believe Hero has been unfaithful to him. It is the treachery of Don John that slanders Hero's virtue. Hero is so horrified by the Claudio's false accusation that she faints and is believed to be dead. By the end of the play, Don John's plot is exposed, Hero has revived, and she marries Claudio.
- *Troilus and Cressida*, set during the Trojan War, borrows its plot from the poem of the same name by Chaucer. The Trojans Troilus and Cressida fall in love with each other. But soon after their love is consummated, Cressida is forced by her father to be turned over to the Greeks, whom he has joined. The incredulous Troilus watches at a distance as Cressida is unfaithful to him with Diomedes, a Greek.
- In *Cymbeline*, Posthumus marries Imogen in Britain, then leaves for Italy. While he is away, Imogen falsely believes he has been killed. Jachimo, Iago-like, then falsely claims to Posthumus that Imogen has cuckolded him with Jachimo.

To this list, we might add two additional plays where betrayal is also a central theme, but it is a group of people rather than one woman who is the perceived betrayer:

- The title character of *Timon of Athens* is generous to a fault, lavishly (and manically?) entertaining his large circle of ostensible friends, and showering them with expensive gifts. But when he learns from his servant that he is insolvent, not a single "friend" is willing to help him. After this betrayal, Timon says "I am Misanthropos, and hate mankind" (4.3.54).

- *Coriolanus* is a courageous and successful Roman general, who returns from war and is expected to humble himself before the people so that he will be elected consul, a high political office. His pride will not permit him to follow this tradition, and he instead insults the people. Their adulation quickly turns to scorn, and they banish Coriolanus from Rome. Feeling betrayed by them, Coriolanus betrays the Romans by joining with their enemy.

Shakespeare's Sonnets also reveal a poet who knows first-hand the deeply deranging power of jealousy —“For if I should despair, I should grow mad,/ And in my madness might speak ill of thee” (Sonnet 140). And of betrayal—“For, thou betraying me, I do betray/ My nobler part to my gross body's treason” (Sonnet 151). Garner perceptively contrasts the theme of betrayal in Shakespeare's plays with its role in his Sonnets. She speculates that the more autobiographical Sonnets record Shakespeare's betrayal by the Fair Youth and by his mistress, and considers the plays to be a sort of reparative “counterfantasy to the Sonnets”— men banding together, in the plays, to protect themselves from imagined betrayal by women. She writes, “I have wondered whether Shakespeare needed to repeat in reverse the experience of the Sonnets [in writing his plays] in order to come to terms with it.”⁶

It has become surprisingly controversial in recent years to speculate about connections between the works and the life of Shakespeare. Theories of literary criticism during past decades (including New Criticism, New Historicism, and Postmodernism) have all undermined traditional interest in connecting a work with its author. There is sometimes a dangerously misleading false dichotomy that claims Shakespeare illustrates the creative potential of native genius, so that he did not need relevant life experiences to shape his literary works. Courageously, Norman Holland has continued to assert a legitimate role for psychoanalytic literary criticism, in the face of this growing opposition. As Holland puts it, “The psychoanalyst plays by different rules from the literary historian. A historian of Renaissance literature might feel it right, useful, or necessary to think always within the Renaissance concept of the self. . . [while] [t]he psychoanalyst tries to interpret individuals... more fully than they can interpret themselves.”⁷ Remarkably, given his traditional authorship assumption, Holland admits that one way Shakespeare copes with his core aggressive conflicts is “by making himself invisible.”⁸ Indeed. This goes to the heart of Freud's theory that “Shakespeare” cloaked his real identity in literary anonymity, through the use of a pen name. Obviously, that is not what Holland meant; he merely implied that Shakespeare hid behind his literary creations.

However, I agree with Freud that a meaningful psychoanalytic investigation of the works of Shakespeare requires us to know who the author actually was. As a result, some of my publications on Shakespeare have had to pursue literary and historical evidence as to his true identity. This article includes such details. Such work is needed so we can persuade defenders of the traditional author that they are wrong.

Here, I will focus on the theme of betrayal in Sonnet 121 (“‘Tis better to be vile than vile esteem'd”). The Sonnets are a rich lode of some of Shakespeare's most

brilliant and psychologically complex creative work. But they have suffered from relative neglect ever since 1623, when they (and Shakespeare's other poems) were omitted from the First Folio, the first edition of Shakespeare's collected plays. By contrast, the literary precedent for Shakespeare's 1623 collection, Ben Jonson's First Folio of 1616 *did* include Jonson's poetry and his plays. The Sonnets' story includes repeated acts of betrayal, by the poet, by the Fair Youth, and by the Dark Lady.

Many psychoanalysts remain unaware that Freud was keenly interested in the question of Shakespeare's true identity. When he died, half of Freud's books on English literature were devoted to that topic, and he became "all but convinced" by the 1920 theory that Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford was the author of the Shakespeare canon. Roland Emmerich's 2011 film *Anonymous* has brought increased public attention to this theory. But it remains surprisingly and bitterly controversial, especially among academic Shakespeare specialists.⁹ In every field, major intellectual breakthroughs are sometimes made by non-specialists, who are not as wedded to the dogmatic assumptions that dominate specialists in that field, and who do not have as much at stake if their innovative ideas are rejected. For example, it was a non-geologist who discovered continental drift, some fifty years before geologists stopped ridiculing his theory and accepted it as accurate.

Space does not allow me to give a full account here of the fascinating evidence that has accumulated since Freud's day that he was correct about Shakespeare's identity. Two books that originally belonged to de Vere have strongly supported Freud on this score. These two books, bound together, are the Geneva Bible, and the Sternhold and Hopkins *Whole Book of Psalms*. Their handwritten annotations show a remarkable overlap with biblical passages that most influenced the works of Shakespeare. Those who support the traditional authorship theory have mostly ignored this evidence, or have tried to dismiss it by speculating that someone other than de Vere made the annotations after reading Shakespeare's works; or that these were simply the most popular Bible verses of Shakespeare's day (they were not). This resembles efforts to defend the once traditional Ptolemaic geocentric solar system by creating ever more "epicycles" to rationalize apparently contradictory evidence from new observations of the movement of the planets and stars. Further, no one had previously recognized that the primary source for Shakespeare's abundant allusions to the Psalms was that now obscure translation owned by de Vere, until the present author found them, thanks to the twenty-one psalms that are marked by hand in de Vere's copy.¹⁰

As I hinted earlier, there was no lack of betrayal in the life of Edward de Vere. As we ponder these pivotal betrayals during his early development, it is easy to infer that he was left with multiple narcissistic wounds, and the sort of narcissistic rage that is ever on the lookout for future hurts, real or imaginary, in order to rationalize wishes to take revenge. In addition, his capacity to trust must have been profoundly shaken. His father died when he was twelve. Soon afterwards, his older sister Katherine took de Vere to court, unsuccessfully trying to have the court declare him a bastard. If she had succeeded, she hoped to take away his sizeable inheritance. He was then removed from his mother, who died six years later, when he was eighteen.

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Queen Elizabeth had him raised by William Cecil, though de Vere may have suspected Cecil of having had his father killed. The Queen proceeded to seize much of de Vere's wealth by the time he turned twenty-one.¹¹ Cecil, as de Vere's guardian, had control over whom he married. Cecil had de Vere marry his own daughter (and de Vere's "foster-sister") Anne, thus elevating her to the rank of countess. The Queen elevated Cecil to Lord Burghley at the same time. Although the Queen kept her word about the mysterious annual pension of 1,000 pounds she began paying de Vere in 1586, de Vere's surviving letters suggest that he felt she broke many other promises to him of other forms of financial assistance.

Like many victims, de Vere sometimes turned the tables and identified with the aggressor, becoming a ruthless victimizer. For reasons that remain unclear, he killed a servant in Cecil's home when he was seventeen, with his fencing rapier. Some have speculated that de Vere became murderously enraged when he learned this servant was spying on him. Cecil did employ a large network of spies. Eight years later, de Vere seemed to suffer from malignant jealousy of his first wife, Anne. They married when he was twenty-one. Four years later, he traveled without her on the Continent for fourteen months.¹² While on this trip he learned that Anne was pregnant, and became convinced that the child was not his (thus turning against his child his sister's earlier accusation of illegitimacy). He refused to live with his wife for several years after he returned to England. It has been speculated that he falsely thought he never consummated their marriage. One possibility is that his wife played a "bed trick" on him (as depicted in *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*; see Adelman), and that she got pregnant when he had sex with her, while he falsely believed he was with a different woman. Since de Vere was bisexual, it is also possible that conflicted homosexual fantasies contributed to his pathological jealousy of Anne, a dynamic that has been reported by Freud and subsequent analysts.

When he was twenty-nine, de Vere felt insulted by Phillip Sidney, a respected poet whose earlier engagement to Anne Cecil was broken by her father so she could marry de Vere. Sidney challenged de Vere to a duel, and de Vere accepted. But the Queen forbade the duel, on the traditional grounds of Sidney's lower social status. De Vere later boasted to friends that he could have Sidney killed without getting caught. A year or so later, he betrayed both his wife and the Queen by impregnating one of the Queen's ladies in waiting, Anne Vavasour. When their illegitimate child (Edward Vere) was born, de Vere, Vavasour, and their infant son were all imprisoned in the Tower of London.

After his release a few weeks later, de Vere was exiled from court for two years. When de Vere was thirty-three, his wife Anne died a few days after giving birth to their fifth child. During the years following her death, de Vere seemed to feel remorse for how wretchedly he had treated her. His plays suggest he may have developed some insight into his past proclivity to feel groundless jealousy of her. In fact, he may have used some of his plays to make reparation to his deceased wife, as he accused himself of acting like Othello and Leontes.

There is circumstantial evidence that de Vere was involved in at least two pivotal love triangles. As I have mentioned, de Vere was bisexual. When the twenty-

five-year-old de Vere returned from Italy, he brought back with him a sixteen-year-old Italian choirboy; de Vere's enemies accused him of using this boy sexually. De Vere seems to have begun an intense love affair with the seventeen-year-old Earl of Southampton in 1590, when de Vere was forty. There were contemporary rumors about the bisexuality of both de Vere and Southampton. The narcissistic aspect of their relationship is underscored by Southampton also being an earl who, like de Vere, was raised by William Cecil after his father died. However, Southampton defied Cecil's order to marry de Vere's daughter (that is, Cecil's granddaughter). The first seventeen sonnets seemed to reflect de Vere's efforts to persuade the seventeen-year-old Southampton to accept this marriage.¹³ Southampton has long been the leading candidate as the "Fair Youth" of the first 126 sonnets. Shakespeare's long poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* were both dedicated to Southampton, in 1593 and 1594, respectively. A painting of the young Southampton was long misidentified as that of a young woman, because of his feminine beauty, and because he even followed the women's fashion of his day by wearing his long hair in front of his left shoulder; this is perhaps the only early modern English portrait of a male that includes that detail. In that connection, one thinks Sonnet 20, which begins "A woman's face, with Nature's own hand painted,/ Hast thou, the master-mistress of my passion."

There is a "rival poet" in some of the sonnets. The allegedly gay Christopher Marlowe has often been proposed as that unnamed rival poet. If so, we might speculate that de Vere's rivalry with Marlowe was both literary and amorous. I believe the ostensible premise of Sonnet 80 ("O how I faint when I of you do write") is that Marlowe, author of *Hero and Leander*, is the better poet.¹⁴ Marlowe was murdered in 1593 under bizarre circumstances, ostensibly over a "reckoning," or bar tab. Recalling de Vere's earlier boast that he could have Sidney killed and not get caught, one might wonder if he successfully carried out such a plan against Marlowe. Sonnet 89 ("Say that thou didst forsake me for some fault") may allude to Southampton's rage over de Vere's role in Marlowe's death. De Vere's other love triangle also included Southampton, and the sexual relationship that both de Vere and Southampton had with the still unidentified "Dark Lady" of Sonnets 127-154 (e.g., Sonnet 134, "So, now I have confessed that he is thine").

One might chart a "developmental line" of the evolution of de Vere's defenses against feelings of betrayal. Profound self-awareness helped advance his capacities to contain and master his earlier propensity for retaliating when he felt betrayed. The late plays such as *A Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* suggest that de Vere was striving to temper his past vindictiveness with forgiveness toward those who wronged him, along with the hope of being forgiven for his own transgressions.¹⁵

I turn now from de Vere's tempestuous life to one of his literary works—Sonnet 121.

Sonnet 121

'Tis better to be vile than vile esteem'd,

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When not to be, receives reproach of being,
And the just pleasure lost, which is so deem'd,
Not by our feeling, but by others' seeing.
For why should others' false adulterate eyes
Give salutation to my sportive blood?
Or on my frailties why are frailer spies,
Which in their wills count bad what I think good--?
No, I am that I am, and they that level
At my abuses, reckon up their own;
I may be straight, though they them-selves be bevel
By their rank thoughts, my deeds must not be shown
Unless this general evil they maintain,
All men are bad and in their badness reign.¹⁶

De Vere is unexcelled in his capacity to create seemingly infinite layers of interrelated meanings in his Sonnets. He was probably better attuned to words than any other writer has ever been. Close study of any sonnet with the Oxford English Dictionary at hand suggests that de Vere was mindful of the multiple meanings of every word he used, and also of their etymologies. Further, we know his (now lost or unidentified) Latin poetry was deemed to be of high quality by one scholarly contemporary (Gabriel Harvey). So he also thought even more broadly of semantic possibilities, given the further Latin meanings of words that other writers have not exploited. For example, I have suggested that "saucy" in Sonnet 80 might derive from the Latin word "saucium," meaning "wounded," alluding to de Vere's permanent lameness after a duel over his affair with Anne Vavasour.¹⁷

In Sonnet 121, Shakespeare reacts to betrayal with profound cynicism. He begins the sonnet by asserting that it is better to go ahead and be "vile" than to be (falsely) considered vile. This is a strategy of desperation. He tries to deflect attention from his morally questionable actions by focusing on the immorality of his critics. Recall that one of the latter was Phillip Sidney, whose lower social standing did not permit him to duel with de Vere. This may be an as yet unexplored meaning of line 12, "By their *rank* thoughts my deeds must not be shown." That is, in addition to the surface meaning of "rank" as "offensive," it may also link up with "level" of line 9 to imply that de Vere's enemies are too much his social inferiors to have the right to condemn him.

One could easily imagine this sonnet being recited as a soliloquy by Hamlet. For one thing, it immediately suggests an additional meaning of the phrase, "not to be." The Bergmanns, in their study of the Sonnets, agree that "not to be" in line two is linked with Hamlet's famous soliloquy (and the phrase "to be" occurs in the sonnet's first line).¹⁸ The simplicity of "I am that I am" then connects with the simplicity of "To be or not to be"; they hinge on different forms of the same verb. The former might even suggest a defiant answer to the mortal doubt of the latter. Further, linking this sonnet with *Hamlet* suggests a relevant implication of "spies." Recall that

Polonius, like de Vere's father-in-law Lord Burghley, employed spies. The speaker in the sonnet, like Hamlet, is furious over learning that he is being spied upon. Spying is listed by Garner as one of the ways that men betray.¹⁹ One recalls the teenage de Vere killing the servant, and one thinks of Hamlet killing Polonius with his sword, when he thinks his uncle, King Claudius, behind the arras, is spying on him.

What else can we say about that unusual phrase in line 9 of Sonnet 121, "I am that I am"? Some readers will recognize this phrase from Exodus 3:14.²⁰ Moses asks God, "if they [the Israelites] say unto me, What is his Name? what answer shall I give them?" And God answers "I am that I am." That is, this is what God names himself. Among the very few extra-biblical, early modern occurrences of this phrase are Sonnet 121— and a 1584 letter written by de Vere, to his father-in-law Lord Burghley. De Vere dictated this letter to his secretary, then added a postscript in his own hand. The context suggests that de Vere is furious because he has discovered that Lord Burghley has induced two of de Vere's servants to spy on him, and report back to Burghley.²¹ The letter alludes to de Vere having become Burghley's ward after his father died when he was twelve. But the proud de Vere is now thirty-four, and his two-year exile from Queen Elizabeth's court had ended a year and a half earlier. In his furiously indignant postscript, de Vere writes, "But I pray, my lord, leave that course. For I mean not to be your ward or your child. I serve Her Majesty, and I am that I am—and by alliance near to Your Lordship, but free. And [I] scorn to be offered that injury to think I am so weak of government to be ruled by servants or not able to govern [control] myself."

So the "others," the "frailer spies" of the sonnet would correspond to the servants and to Burghley, who is directing their actions. "I am that I am" in this sonnet also suggests that something in de Vere's relationship with the Earl of Southampton has revived past betrayals by de Vere's guardian and father-in-law. It suggests a sort of father surrogate negative transference displaced onto Southampton, five sonnets before the Fair Youth subsequence ends in disillusionment (e.g., "Hence, thou suborned informer!" of Sonnet 125).

Still more speculatively, some of the content of this sonnet suggests associations with Marlowe, de Vere's foremost literary rival. As I mentioned earlier, Sonnet 80 alludes to Marlowe's poem *Hero and Leander*, which he left unfinished when he was killed in May of 1593. De Vere's poem *Venus and Adonis* was published within two weeks of Marlowe's death. As noted, it was dedicated to the Earl of Southampton. It is easy to imagine that Marlowe, like de Vere, planned to dedicate his poem to Southampton.

Recall that Marlowe's death was allegedly over a tavern bill, or "reckoning." So "reckon up" in this sonnet may be intended to remind Southampton of Marlowe's death, especially since one of the several meanings of "reckon up" here is to "count" up the sum of a list of numbers. So, the poet's "frailties" and "abuses" might include his role in Marlowe's death, for which Southampton probably never forgave de Vere. "Spies" also might allude to Southampton's erotic relationship with the Earl of Essex, after Marlowe's death. Essex is known to have employed a network of spies himself.

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It is possible that these spies had reported to Essex and Southampton about de Vere's love life, and de Vere has learned of this.

Since the Bible is Shakespeare's most influential literary source, several Sonnet commentators have understandably speculated about possible biblical echoes in Sonnet 121.²² Katherine Duncan-Jones thinks "give salutation" in line 6 might allude ironically to the Annunciation, since three of the eight uses of "salutation" in the Geneva Bible occur in Luke's description of the angel announcing to Mary that she will give birth to the Messiah.²³ Stephen Booth, a brilliant Sonnet commentator, hears faint echoes of the last eight chapters of Acts²⁴ in this sonnet. If he is correct, three words in a large font at the top of the page containing chapter 26 might be relevant to Sonnet 121: "Paul *counted* [considered] *mad*." This may contribute to the meanings of "count bad" in line 8.

Helen Vendler intriguingly speculates about an additional biblical allusion in Sonnet 121: The Gospel story of Jesus defending the woman who was caught "in the very act" of adultery (John 8:1-11).²⁵ That is, she was watched by "spies." If Vendler is correct, it might suggest that de Vere's motives in writing this sonnet included his attempt to cope with having been caught in flagrante delicto. By implication, the "others" with "false adulterate eyes" – the "frailer spies" – are being compared with the scribes and Pharisees of the Gospel story. And de Vere is comparing himself not just with someone committing adultery, but specifically with a woman.

To my knowledge, no Sonnet commentator has noticed another possible biblical allusion in Sonnet 121. The phrase "false adulterate eyes" in line 5 makes one think of 2 Peter 2:14 — "[False prophets and false teachers,] [h]aving *eyes* full of *adulterie*, and that cannot cease to sin, beguiling unstable souls: they have hearts exercised with covetousness, [those] cursed children." And "evil" of line 13 (itself an anagram of "vile" of line 1) occurs three times in this chapter, referring to these false prophets. The summary of this second epistle of Peter in the Geneva Bible speaks of God "punishing the hypocrites who abuse his Name." These further biblical allusions cloak de Vere in religious righteousness, if not Divinity itself, as he replies to his accusers.

Line 8 of the sonnet has the phrase, "Which in their wills *count bad* what I think good." Some dozen times, the Geneva Bible uses the verb "count" to mean making a moral assessment. For example, the dying King David tells his son Solomon (1 Kings 2:9), "But thou shalt not *count* him [that is, Shimer, who had earlier cursed King David] *innocent*: for thou art a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do unto him: therefore thou shalt cause his hoary head to go down to the grave with blood" (emphasis added). We know that de Vere paid special attention to this biblical verse, since he underlined most of it. It may have influenced his similar phrase in Sonnet 121, "count bad," which is equivalent to David's "not count innocent."

De Vere underlined the following words in the preceding verse 8— "Shimer, which cursed me with an horrible curse." We might wonder if de Vere's reflections in Sonnet 121 about being betrayed by his enemies make use of his identification with King David to justify himself in the face of his critics' accusations. This impression is further strengthened by the one phrase that de Vere underlined in the summary

of this book of the Bible: “flourishing kingdoms, except they be preserved by God’s protection (who then favoereth them when his word is truly set forth, virtue esteemed, vice punished, and concord maintained) fall to decay and come to naught” (emphasis added). “Virtue esteemed” in this underlined passage recalls the contrasting “vile esteemed” in the first line of Sonnet 121.

One might correctly conclude from these biblical allusions that de Vere had high self-esteem, if not a pathological degree of arrogance. Sonnet 62 (“Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye”) openly admits he suffered from the “iniquity” of excessive narcissism. De Vere seems comfortable comparing himself respectively with King David, with Saint Paul, with the unknown pagan god, and even with the Judeo-Christian God himself. It is not surprising that someone with such extreme narcissism would be vulnerable to feelings of betrayal.

Freud asked his followers to re-examine Shakespeare’s works psychoanalytically, based on a new awareness of Shakespeare’s true identity. I hope that recent evidence that Freud was correct about Edward de Vere having written these works will encourage many psychoanalysts to take up Freud’s challenge. We can thus help restore the crucial connections between the literary works and the life experiences and psychology of their author. Doing so will enrich our psychoanalytic understanding of literature. It should also help to rejuvenate literary studies, which have been led astray by false assumptions about Shakespeare’s identity, and about the allegedly minor role his and other authors’ life experiences played in their literary creations.

Betrayal in the life of Edward de Vere helps illuminate the theme of betrayal in his works, including his plays and his Sonnet 121. Most pointedly, the phrase “I am that I am” in this sonnet draws attention to de Vere’s use of the same phrase in his angry 1584 letter to his father-in-law, Lord Burghley. Both the letter and Sonnet 121 seem to allude to de Vere’s profound sense of betrayal upon learning that he was being spied upon. We can begin to uncover new levels of meaning in this sonnet—and in Shakespeare’s works in general—when we restore the lost connections between the works and their true author.

The profession of psychoanalysis was founded on a willingness to pursue the truth wherever it might lead, despite the patient’s reluctance to face the truth about herself. Psychoanalysis is unavoidably controversial when it pursues its highest ideals. James Strachey persuaded Freud to censor the publication of his beliefs about Shakespeare’s identity, for fear of offending the English. We can no longer allow a fear of offending the English professors to continue to stifle our pursuit of the truth about who wrote Shakespeare’s works.

Endnotes

¹ See Waugaman, 2009b.

² I will continue to use the traditional name of the author, just as we still speak of the works of Mark Twain, although we know his legal name was Samuel Clemens.

³ Both “betrayal” and “treason” come from the same Latin root, “tradere.”

⁴ Waugaman, 2007.

⁵ Shirley Nelson Garner, “Male Bonding and the Myth of Women’s Deception in Shakespeare’s Plays.” In Holland et al., pp. 135-150.

⁶ Garner, 149.

⁷ Norman H. Holland, Sidney Homan, and Bernard J. Paris (eds.), *Shakespeare’s Personality* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 5.

⁸ Holland, 7.

⁹ See Waugaman, 2012.

¹⁰ See Waugaman, 2009d, 2010a, 2010c, 2011a.

¹¹ Nina Green, “The Fall of the House of Oxford.” *Brief Chronicles: The Interdisciplinary Journal of the Shakespeare Fellowship* 1:41-95 (2009).

¹² The year he spent in Italy explains the detailed knowledge of it in the plays of Shakespeare; see Richard Roe, *The Shakespeare Guide to Italy*. New York: Harper, 2011.

¹³ See Waugaman, 2010b.

¹⁴ Waugaman, 2011b.

¹⁵ Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011.

¹⁶ I have restored much of the punctuation of the original 1609 edition, since the changes made by recent editors may deprive us of some of the poet’s meaning. I have added a dash at the end of the eighth line, to highlight the fact that the poet leaves this question unfinished, inviting the reader to imagine what words are suppressed here. The elliptical phrase might be reworded as, “Frailer spies are ____ on my frailties. Why?” The missing word might be “spying.” Why is this question interrupted before it is completed? De Vere often echoes the content of his poetry in its form. The secrecy of the spying might be enacted, for example, in his leaving the word out. Alternatively, he may be enacting here a particularly sharp “volta,” or turn, from the octave to the sestet.

¹⁷ Waugaman, 2010.

¹⁸ Martin S. Bergmann and Michael Bergman, *What Silent Love Hath Writ: A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (New York: Gotschna Ventures, 2008).

¹⁹ Garner, 143.

²⁰ It is also found in Corinthians. The passage from Exodus is quoted in John Lyly’s 1578 novel *Euphues*. It occurs in a 1578 prayer by Edward Dering, to be recited before

reading the Bible (“Flesh and blood cannot reveal the mysteries of thy heavenly kingdom unto me, but by thy blessed will I am that I am, and by the same know I that I know”). It is also in C.K.’s dedication of the 1596 *The History of a Florentine Woman*, by “C.M.”; two more pseudonyms of de Vere’s?

²¹ Another theory is that Burghley had asked the financially reckless de Vere to let a trusted servant manage his financial affairs.

²² Scholars agree it was the Geneva translation of the Bible that most influenced Shakespeare; it is this translation that I quote here.

²³ Duncan-Jones, Katherine, *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (London: Arden, 1997), 352.

²⁴ Acts 17:23, in the Latin Vulgate translation, provided one of de Vere’s literary pseudonyms: “Ignoto,” from “Ignoto deo,” referring to the statue to the unknown god in Athens. Acts 17:28 refers to “poets”—apparently the only reference to “poets” in the Geneva Bible.

²⁵ Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1997), 515-516.

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